

First Ladies of America



Rosalynn Carter could be described in many ways, but the best way might be as a woman of faith. As a girl growing up in Plains, Ga., it was faith in God and in her family that shaped her life and defined her values.

As a first lady, she was guided by the belief that the lives of those struggling with special needs could be made better. Compassionate and committed to service, Mrs. Carter worked diligently in the White House on behalf of women, children, the elderly, the developmentally disabled, and those who suffered from mental illness.

Rosalynn Carter learned as a child that life can be difficult. Her father died when she was 13, and as the oldest of four children, she helped her mother hold the family together. While her mother worked long hours as a seamstress, Rosalynn assisted with the sewing, took on household chores, and worked in a beauty shop to earn spending money. Later in life she said her strong work ethic came from watching her mother.

Despite these challenges, she graduated from high school as class valedictorian and enrolled in college. After completing her freshman year, she accepted a date with the brother of her friend Ruth Carter, and life took an unexpected turn. Home for a visit while attending the U.S. Naval Academy, Jimmy Carter took Rosalynn out; a year later she became a Navy wife, following her husband as his military career took them across the country.

Mrs. Carter learned the family business back in Plains after her husband left the Navy and campaigned for him, sometimes on her own, when

he entered politics. Elected governor of Georgia and then president, Jimmy Carter considered Rosalynn his closest advisor.

Mrs. Carter was present at briefings and Cabinet meetings and met with the president weekly in the Oval Office to discuss policy and legislation related to her interests as the first lady.

She served as the President's spokesperson on various issues, particularly those relating to health and education. She was the first first lady to maintain an office in the East Wing of the White House, and during her tenure, Congress appropriated funds for the first time to support the work of a first lady.

**Jimmy
Carter
Administration,
1977-1981**

She played an important role in creating and passing the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980 and lobbied Congress to pass the Age Discrimination Act, the Older Americans Act, and the Rural Clinics Act. She encouraged Americans to volunteer in their communities, setting an example by working as a volunteer in local Washington, D.C. programs to assist at-risk youth and the developmentally disabled.

Since leaving 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Mrs. Carter's efforts to make a difference in the lives of others have not diminished. Through her work with the Carter Center in Atlanta, she continues to raise awareness about mental health issues, and she has published two books to assist family, friends and caregivers of the mentally ill. Her current work has focused on meeting the mental health needs of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Rosalynn Smith Carter

Born: Aug. 18, 1927 in Plains Georgia

Education: Plains High School, Plains, Georgia;

Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia

Marriage: 1946 to James Earl "Jimmy" Carter

Children: John William "Jack" Carter, (1947);

James Earl "Chip" Carter (1950);

Donnel Jeffrey "Jeff" Carter (1952); Amy Lynn Carter (1967)

